

[James H. Childers]

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[Folk?] Stuff - [Rangelore?]

Gauthier, Sheldon F.

Rangelore

Tarrant Co., Dist. #7 [3?]

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[FEC?]

James H. Childers, 83, living at 1320 College Ave., Fort Worth, Tex., was born on a plantation in Murray co., Ga., Dec. 10, 1855. His parents were Jane (Gray) Childers and John Childers. Prior to the Civil War and his death in 1857, his father was the overseer for a large plantation owner in Murray co. After the Civil War, in 1868, his mother, Mrs. John Childers, moved to Tennessee. James H. Childers came to Tarrant co., Texas, in 1877. He bought a tract of land nine miles [S.W.?] of Fort Worth, on which land he developed a farm. He was ranch foreman of the [W?]. J. [Boaz?] cattle ranch for a period of 17 years. After terminating his employment with the [W?]. J. [Boaz?] ranch, he bought additional land adjacent to his farm and entered the cattle business, and has since continued in the cattle business. He was elected to the office of County Commissioner in 1918 and served the terms. His story:

The place and date of my birth was Murray co., Ga., Dec. 10, [1855?]. My parents were John and Jane (Gray) Childers. Father was an overseer for a large plantation owner of Murray county. Father died in 1857, and mother moved to Tenn. in 1868, where she had

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relatives living. I lived with her and farmed until I was 22, which was in 1877, and then I came to Texas. I came direct to Fort Worth and have lived here ever since.

“When I came to Fort Worth the T. & P. was its only railroad, having built into the city the previous year. At the time I arrived I was compelled to walk over a mile to Main St.

“This spot of ground where I am now living was part of a cattle ranch, as was practically all the South Side of Fort Worth. There were a few houses and cultivated fields scattered through the region. C12 [????] 2 “The business establishments of the city was situated around the south side of the courthouse square and extended south for about three blocks. The main residential section extended out from the business section east and west for a few blocks.

“The principal business of the town was cattle dealing. The people of Fort Worth lived on incomes derived from the ranches which surrounded the town for many miles. At the time of my arrival there was also a considerable buffalo hide business transacted here. Buffalo hides were hauled into Fort Worth by teams from the [West?] and shipped out of here by train.

“Every day, one could see a hundred or more wagon loads of dry hides pulling into the city. Almost all the wagons had a loaded trailer hitched to it. The block of land where the [Wood's?] building is now located, on Lancaster Ave., was the buffalo hide yard. Haulers arrived and unloaded hides through the day. At times the yard was covered with hides stacked several feet high.

“One would see large numbers of cowboys on the streets everywhere, dressed in their full range attire, the 10-gallon hat, high heel boots, bandana around their necks, cartridge belt and the six-gun. Also, the buffalo hunters and hide haulers were conspicuous by their numbers.

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"The town was rough and ready. If one desired a little or a large amount of trouble, he could easily find it, but if one wished to be peaceful and not [intrude?] on any one there there was little danger of being molested or harmed.

"The cowboys were bent on having fun when in town, and they were somewhat rough in their method of play. [With?] 200 or 300 3 cowhands in a town the size Fort Worth was in those days, it was impossible to handle the crowd and compel the boys to confine their hilarity to genteel manners.

"I have seen 20 to 30 mounted cowboys leaving town in a crowd, riding at top speed and all shooting their guns in the air and yelling as wild Indians. It was not an unusual occurrence for a crowd of cowboys to shoot the bar fixtures of some saloon full of holes, just to enjoy seeing the patrons duck and run for cover. Also, shooting out the lights of some establishment was one/ of their favorite games.

"One night I watched a crowd of waddies celebrating in a saloon. The bartender failed to serve a drink as quickly as one of the waddies desired to be served and the fellow shot a hole into a barrel of whiskey so he could get his drink of whiskey from the liquor as it poured out of the hole.

"It must be said to the credit of the waddies, that they always paid for their fun. [When?] the boys had shot out the lights, shot the bar fixtures, or any other damage which they did, they would return and pay for all destroyed property.

"During the early days, the streets of Fort Worth were not paved, so when there was a period of wet weather the streets were impassable in many places. It was a common occurrence, during wet weather, to see teams stuck in a mud hole. Between the courthouse and the depot there was about three blocks of plank sidewalk. Some of those planks were loose, and one was compelled to stop cautiously or take the chance of being tripped. 4 "Rush St. (now Commerce) was the notorious street of the town. The principal

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business places located on the street were [quean?] joints, gambling houses, saloons and honky-tonks. The waddies rode into town from distances as far as 100 miles to celebrate. Rush street was where they went to take in the sights. As a rule, the street furnished any diversion which one cared to indulge in.

“My first move after arriving here was to locate a tract of land. I bought a tract located nine miles southwest of Forth Worth and established a farm.

“It was necessary to fence the cultivated field to keep the cattle out, because the entire country was on open range, except for a few scattered fenced fields.

“During my first year in Fort Worth, I became acquainted with [W?]. J. [Boaz?], one of the early day ranchers, and about the year 1880 I accepted the position as ranch foreman under him. His ranch was located west of Forth Worth, about 10 miles, where [Seabrook?] is now located. [Boaz?] owned almost 3,000 acres of land entirely devoted to ranging cattle. In the same section were located Corn's, Winfield Scott's, [?] and other ranches. The ranches utilized the Clear Fork of the Trinity River for their cattle's water supply.

“The [Boaz?] ranch varied greatly in the number of cattle we ranged. At times we would have over 1,000 head and then we would sell till the herd numbered as low as 200.

“[Boaz?] did not raise many of his own cattle, but bought and sold constantly. When he found a good buy he bought the cattle 5 and would range the animals till he could sell at a satisfactory price.

“The first year I managed the [Boaz?] ranch we fenced the 3,000 acres and thereafter our crew numbered about six hands. We used our waddy to ride the fence line constantly. His job was to inspect the fence for defects and repair all minor defects, but if he found a major break, such as a broken post, broken or cut wires, he would report it, and a repair crew, with the necessary material, would make the repairs.

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“Occasionally, we would find the wire cut. The wire cutting was done by cattle thieves, [who?] cut a gap through which they would drive the stolen stock. [We?] were compelled to keep a close watch for thieves. One or two men were used to ride the range whose principal job was to watch the thieves. Also, to attend to injured and bogged cattle.

“[We?] kept salt [licks?] close to headquarters and near the river where the cattle could get water, and near the licks is where the cattle chose their bedding grounds. The cattle would range over various sections of the range during the day and begin to drift towards their bedding ground towards the late part of the evening. By coaxing the cattle to bed near the headquarters, we reduced the [chances?] of having cattle stolen during the night. Our time of trouble with rustlers was during the day when the cattle would scatter and some grazed near the fence. If a thief was watching for a chance to steal some of our cattle, it was an easy matter for him to cut the fence and drive the cattle away. Our losses to the thieves were small because of the fence and the constant watch we maintained.

“The man who suffered the most from rustlers in our section was Corn. A thief came very near to putting Corn out of the cattle business. For a period of time he was losing cattle constantly. In order to create an interest in catching the thief, Corn offered a reward of \$500.00. Corn's foreman was a fellow named Mitchell and he stayed awake many nights watching for the thief, and during the day he put one of the waddies attending to part of the foreman's work so that he could devote the time watching for the rustler. But he was unsuccessful.

“Tom Snow, now deputy sheriff, was just commencing his career as a law enforcement officer, and one day a negro came to Tom with several letters and a complaint. The colored fellow's complaint was that the man he had been hauling some cattle for had cheated him out of some of his pay. The negro said he had hauled cattle from Corn's ranch and the dispute, over pay, developed the previous day. He had hauled a large cow into market and the weather was exceedingly hot, and because of the weather condition the cow became overheated and died. The negro and his employer took the [carcass?] to

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a ravine east of the city where they skinned and quartered it. The rest was sold to a retail butcher named Zimmerman.

“The letter dropped out of the employer's pocket when he took his coat off and threw it on a bush, while skinning the cow. The negro took the letters to Tom Snow to disclose the name of his employer. The letters were addressed to Mitchell, Corn's foreman. “Mitchell was a man with an excellent reputation and had worked hard to catch the rustler, even to staying awake night and 7 laying out on the range watching but there were the letters. Snow went to the ranch and arrested Mitchell, and when the prisoner was confronted with the letters and the story as told by the negro, he confessed. He was tried and sent to the penitentiary. The stealing stopped on Corn's ranch immediately with the arrest of Mitchell.

“This series of incidents took place before the days of the automobile. [With?] the coming of the automobile truck, there came a change in the methods of the cattle rustler. Now, the rustler hauls the cattle off in a truck instead of driving the critters off or loading the animal in a wagon.

“The rustlers have improved their methods, keeping progress with the times, and now have a trailer or truck and gate arranged to meet their needs. The boys now back their vehicle up to a fence and the end gate is lowered and the top part reaches [over?] the fence and rests on the ground. This arrangement forms a chute, up which the cattle are driven. The present day tame cattle can be driven up a chute very easily. Even a more adequate arrangement than the end gate is used by some. It is known that some thieves use a crane with which they lift the cattle out of the pasture and swing the critters into the truck bed. By using the crane, all that is necessary is to drive the critter to the side of the fence and throw a swing-harness on the animal, and then use the crane.

“The sale of stolen cattle has been greatly restricted by the efforts of the Cattlemen's Association. The Association maintains inspectors at the cattle markets and they watch for

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brands which are reported stolen. However, there are buyers who buy stolen 8 cattle, but make the purchases outside of the regular markets.

“An incident which took place between [Weston?] and Corn is brought to my mind by talking about cattle rustling.

“When I first came to Fort Worth, there were a few unbranded cattle to be found on the range. Also, occasionally, a stray branded critter would be found which had gotten away from some herd which had been driven through Fort Worth.

“The various ranchers kept on the watch for strays. One day [Weston?] and Corn were riding over the range region together and found three head of tiptop strayed yearling steers. [Weston?] suggested that Corn and he flip a [coin?] for the odd steer and to drive the steers to their ranch. This suggestion was agreeable to Corn and the [coin?] was flipped, resulting in [Weston?] winning the odd steer. Then Corn suggest that they should return the following morning to get the steers, because the hour was late, and driving the steers, as would be necessary, would keep the men out late. [Weston?] agreed to the suggestion, as the two men speeded their mounts homeward.

“Corn met [Weston?] the following morning, as agreed, and rode to get their steers. When the men arrived at where the steers had been found, the animals were no where in sight. The two men spent about an hour hunting for the strays then quit, thinking somebody had taken the three animals.

“About a month later [Weston?] and Corn were discussing the disappearance of the three steers. [Weston?] said:

“‘Corn, I wonder who got 'em'.

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"You know, [Weston?], I never lie', Corn replied. 'I just 9 figured them critters weren't safe with you knowing where they were. So, I doubled back after parting with you that night and drove the steers home. I made fair time and arrived home about 2 P.M.'

"[Weston?] and Corn were good men. In fact, every rancher in the region were good men, and practically all ranchers I have met were dependable men, but they just couldn't resist snatching a pretty yearling. A fat and magnificent yearling was just too tempting to them and they couldn't keep from driving the animal home.

"During my early days here there were hundreds of cattle herds driven in and through Fort Worth. Many were shipped from here to the Northern markets. Many of the herds were driven through here, to be grazed on the Northern ranges of Kans., Nev., Mont., and other sections. They were driven to the Northern range to be fattened before delivery to the markets and others were being shifted to a less congested range.

"With the herds coming here and being drifted through, the ranchers in the section discovered many strays. Generally, the strays were the result of a stampede.

"The worst stampede I have ever seen take place happened just south of town. A herd was drifting in and a terrible storm blew in from the north, striking the cattle in the face.

"The herd was [fretful?], because of being in strange territory, and when the storm started the herd turned and went on a stampede. The storm started just before dark and soon the darkness made it 10 impossible for the waddies to see where they were going or where the cattle were traveling to. This stampede cost the [drover?] about [100?] head of cattle. Of course all the strays were found later by the ranchers in this vicinity.

"After the Cattlemen's Association was organized and developed to a position so it covered the many problems of the ranchers, the Association looked after the strays of the drovers that were found by ranchers of the territory through which the herd traveled.

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"After I had worked 17 years for [Boaz?], I quit to enter the cattle business for myself. I bought additional land adjacent to my farm land for range purposes. I fenced about 800 acres and in the pasture I ranged about 500 head, on an average.

"I started my ranch at the bottom of the 1893 panic. The prices were low and I bought some of the yearlings as low as \$5.00 per head.

"I calculated on holding the cattle for a year or two before selling. I anticipated the market would be on the upswing during the following couple years. My guess was correct and before the two year period was up I began to sell at a fair profit.

"During the panic of 1893, many ranchers were compelled to quit, because the price of cattle were so low the stock did not bring enough money to pay the debts. The ranchers with a little money ahead were able to stay in the business by marking time, but the man who owed money on his stock found himself unable to sell the cattle for enough to pay the loan. There were some shipments made which did not sell for enough to pay for transportation cost to the Northern market. 11 "I bought close and was at very little expense ranging the herd. My range being fenced and with an abundance of grass and water, all I had to do was to meet the expense of one man. Wages were low and I paid my helper \$15.00 per month [?] we needed to do was to watch the fence for breaks and look over the herd occasionally for sick or injured cattle. With a small herd and plenty of range room, one is not troubled to any extent with sick or injured cattle.

"My herd did well and stayed in excellent [flesh?]. Therefore, while the panic ruined many ranchers, it enabled me to get an excellent start in the cattle business.

"By the time I was ready to sell cattle, there was a good market in Fort Worth. The packing industry had been established here, which took place in 1902, and it was then I was ready to do any great amount of selling.

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"I was never entirely out of the cattle business from the time I started in the business. I was elected and served two terms as a member of the Commissioner's Court of Tarrant County, and this position took me away from active attention to my cattle business. My service as a commissioner began in 1918, and after I terminated my service as a county official, I have left the work of raising cattle to others.

"About all I do now is think of the days when the longhorn steer and the animals roamed, numbering thousands of herds, over the Texas range. Branded by their owner, the animals were turned loose to find their living. During the days of the open range 12 cattle drifted for many miles and the brand of many different ranchers could be seen grazing with a specific herd. Perhaps some of the animals would be more than 100 miles away from their home range.

"The general roundup was the medium of separating the cattle and driving the strays back home. The general roundup was a cooperative work, participated in by the ranchers, and very interesting to work in or watch. Many people came to visit and watch the work at the roundup.

"The roundup crew was divided into various units. One crew would ride the range and gather the cattle, working one section at a time. Another crew held the gathered cattle till the herd had been worked. There was the cutting crew whose [duty?] was to cut out the unbranded critters and separate the various brands and, of course, the branding crew did the branding.

"Each ranch had its own brand on hand, and the branding crew kept the branding irons heated to the proper temperature. The cutters would yell out the brand required for the critter coming out of the herd, and the brand boss would repeat the brand called. The branding crew branded the critter and the [counter?] recorded it in the count book. At the conclusion of the roundup, each rancher was given a record of the number of cattle branded with his brand.

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“The most enjoyable sight to watch was the swing crew, which is the term applied to the gathering crew, leaving in the morning. From 10 to 20 mounted men would start with the word 'go', and it was always a race among the crew for the lead.